

EXTRACT

the WEB



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Front cover shows (top) Akos Armont as Travis, (lower left) Robin Goldsworthy as Fred, and (lower right) Amanda Woodhams as Susan in the 2009 Black Swan / HotHouse Theatre production. (Photo: Karen Donnelly).

Cover design by Emma Vine, Currency Press.

The Web was first produced by Black Swan Theatre Company and HotHouse Theatre at The Butter Factory Theatre, Wodonga, on 2 September 2009 with the following cast:

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| TRAVIS | Akos Armont |
| FRED | Robin Goldsworthy |
| IVY | Susan Prior |
| SERGEANT TUKOVSKY | Igor Sas |
| SUSAN | Amanda Woodhams |

Director, Marcelle Schmitz
Set and Costume Design, Bryan Woltjen
Lighting Design, Martin Kinnane
Sound Design, Russell Godsmith
Dramaturg, Campion Decent

CHARACTERS

TRAVIS, 16, school student, prefect

FRED, 16, school student

IVY, 35, Fred's mother

SERGEANT TUKOVSKY, police officer

SUSAN, teenage girl

SETTING

Chapman—an Australian country town.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

Lights up on an alleyway in an Australian country town. It is daytime. The sun glints across the concrete. Birds sing. Cars hum in the distance. Two sixteen-year-old boys, TRAVIS and FRED, in private school uniforms, stand across from each other. TRAVIS wears a glittering array of prefect badges.

They see one another. Smile.

They walk slowly across the stage towards each other. Never taking their eyes off the other's face.

They get face to face and smiles broaden. They could almost kiss.

Beat. Then...

FRED stabs TRAVIS. He thrusts the knife into his stomach deep and hard and holds it there.

Lower left side of the abdomen.

Their faces still close, TRAVIS smiles.

TRAVIS: I love you.

He slides off the knife and collapses to the ground.

FRED gets a mobile phone out of TRAVIS' pocket. He sits on the pavement, a little way away from the dying TRAVIS. He dials the phone.

FRED: Hello. My name's Fred. I'd like to report a murder.

He hangs up, puts the phone back in TRAVIS' pocket and waits.

SCENE TWO

TRAVIS lies in the same position, only now he is wearing a hospital gown.

He gets up, dusts himself off. Smiles at the audience.

He is bright, chirpy, engaging. Our friend.

TRAVIS: Accidents happen in a town like Chapman.

This hospital caters for the dozen or so towns and stations that are found in the Chapman area. A region of industries where the desert meets the sea. Mining, farming, fishing.

People blow in and out of Chapman with the seasons. Some stay on, settle down. Some of them take off 'cause of the weather, the boredom. But us farming families, we're here to stay. It's all we know.

I'm Travis. I go to St Isidore's College. It's a big school. Nine hundred and fifty pupils. Some boys. Some men. I'll let you decide which category I fit into. Assembly is a sea of long socks and dirty fingernails. It's exam time right now, and despite being in here—or rather, especially because I'm in here—it's all looking pretty good for me.

This is the intensive care ward of Sacred Heart Hospital. They usually deal with farmers crushed by hay bales. Fishermen left fingerless by craypot ropes. Homebirths gone wrong.

Every accident is based around work and family. So you can imagine how exciting it was when I came in. A stabbing. Even though I was in and out of consciousness I could hear the whispers dancing in and out of my head.

A stabbing! A stabbing! He's been stabbed! A stab wound! The nurses went nuts.

The best thing about the word 'stab' is that it sounds like what it is. Stab. Stab. Stab. It's violent but quick. Great letter groupings. The S and the T combine to form a sharp strike that cuts through the A to the B's bite. It's onomatopoeic. Stab. You can see I'll be totally okay with my English exam.

Small towns also attract strangeness. Mystery. Like the girls. The missing girls? Three in four months and not a scrap of evidence. One a Swedish hitchhiker, one a working girl from down the docks and one a barmaid from the local. Gone, just like that. Poor things.

It's left us all in a weird kind of limbo. No-one quite trusts each other. We look at each other differently. 'Is that the guy?' 'Will she be next?' Everyone condemning each other under a big Chapman magnifying glass.

Watching and judging.

We should be kinder to each other, us humans.

He smiles, embarrassed.

Sorry. That was the morphine talking.

Beat.

It's a strange thing, to be stabbed. I didn't even know he'd done it. I didn't even know.

While I was looking into his face, I felt the warm spread of hot fluid on my belly.

But I didn't look down. I was lost in his eyes.

I could smell his breath. I'd never really smelt his breath before. He'd been drinking choc milk. A few hours before, I reckon. A bit sour. But still sweet. And definitely choc milk. Strawberry.

And then I felt him leaving me. I felt that sharp sheath exiting my body. I didn't want it to leave. It felt like it was taking me with it. And then, as my brain filled my body with a potent blend of defensive chemicals... he was gone.

SCENE THREE

FRED *and* SERGEANT TUKOVSKY *sit in an interview room.*

FRED *is covered in blood.*

TUKOVSKY: Can I get you a drink? A water? Cup of tea?

FRED: Can I have anything?

TUKOVSKY: Well, within reason.

FRED: What's within reason?

TUKOVSKY: It means you can't have beer, bourbon, scotch on the rocks or sake.

FRED *looks confused.*

FRED: I just want a choc milk.

TUKOVSKY: A choc milk? I'm sure we can track one down for you. [*He calls out.*] Thommo! Get a choc milk for the interview room, would you?!

FRED: Strawberry choc. Not chocolate choc.

TUKOVSKY: Goes without saying. Strawberry choc, Thommo! [*He gets out a dictaphone and analyses it closely.*] That's 'record', yeah?

FRED *looks. Nods.*

Writing's too bloody small. [*He presses it.*] Try to talk into the bit with the holes.

FRED: 'Kay.

TUKOVSKY: Now, Fred, for the record, could I get you to state your full name, age and place of residence?

FRED: Fred Finch. Sixteen. Lot 23, Rifle Range Road, Rural Mail Box 41, Murchison Flats.

Is Mum okay? Has anyone seen her?

TUKOVSKY: Your mum will be here soon. She was on her way in to work and had to find someone to stay with your sister.

We're going to organise somewhere for you to go. But I need to speak to you about a few things first.

FRED: But is she okay? Mum?

TUKOVSKY: As well as can be expected, Fred. You'll see her soon. She's coming.

FRED: To take me home?

TUKOVSKY: No, Fred mate. You won't be going home.

FRED: I thought I'd be okay. She said you'd make sure I was okay.

TUKOVSKY: She?

FRED: Oh, bum.

TUKOVSKY: You're okay, Fred. Just sit tight. [*Beat.*] You do realise what you've done, mate?

FRED: Yeah. [*He smiles genuinely at TUKOVSKY.*] I'd really like my choc milk.

TUKOVSKY: You stabbed someone, Fred. Travis Masters. Stabbed him right in the gut like a fish.

FRED: I know. [*Beat.*] I didn't want to do it like that. That's not the right way. Gutting them while they're still trying to catch their breath. On the farm it's either a bullet in the head or a cut throat. Quick, easy and painless. I don't think it's right the way the fishermen do it. Dad didn't think so either. But that's how I did it to Trav.

He goes quiet.

TUKOVSKY: How many head you got out there now, Fred? Since...

FRED: Not many. Mum's thinking of selling up. She wants to keep the chooks though. She likes the chooks.

Beat.

TUKOVSKY: I'm gonna need to ask you some questions about why you did it. Understand?

FRED: Is he dead?

TUKOVSKY: No, mate. Not quite. You did some damage though. He's not out of the woods yet.

FRED: So I didn't do it? I didn't kill him?

TUKOVSKY: No.

FRED gets up and starts pacing.

FRED: Oh, bum. Oh, bum. Oh, bum...

TUKOVSKY: Sit down please, Fred mate.

FRED: Where's Becky?

TUKOVSKY: She's safe. She's at Mrs Haigh's.

FRED: Are you sure? He hasn't been near her? Have you even checked?

TUKOVSKY: Mate, she's fine.

FRED keep pacing and moaning.

FRED: He's not dead? Bum, bum, bum, bum, bum... Where is he?

TUKOVSKY: Hospital. Fred, you're gonna have to sit down or I'll have to handcuff you to the chair, alright?

FRED: I should've known he wasn't dead. He looked different to how Dad looked. Dad was so still. You remember, Sergeant Tukovsky?

TUKOVSKY: I remember, mate.

FRED: Remember how still he was? Like something had just left him. Even the rope wasn't moving.

TUKOVSKY: He'd been in that tree a while, mate.

FRED: But he looked peaceful, didn't he? More peaceful than I'd ever seen him ever.

TUKOVSKY stares at him.

Travis isn't dead.

TUKOVSKY: No.

FRED sits at the table again. He is suddenly calm.

FRED: How are the other cases going?

TUKOVSKY: What other cases?

FRED: The girls. Susan and the others.

TUKOVSKY: Susan and the others? The missing girls? Is that who you're talking about?